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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001352

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SUBJECT: BRV MARKS INDEPENDENCE DAY WITH "PATRIOTISM,
SOCIALISM, OR DEATH!"

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT R. DOWNES
FOR REASON 1.4 (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. The BRV commemorated the 196th anniversary of Venezuela's Independence Day on July 5 with a civil-military parade and an extraordinary session at the National Assembly (NA). During the parade, members of the pro-government communal councils marched alongside members of the Bolivarian Armed Forces and Reservists Corps. The BRV's slogan "Patriotism, Socialism or Death," was used pervasively throughout the event. Following the parade, Janlisbert "Libertad" Velasco, a pro-Chavez student leader from the Central University of Venezuela, addressed the NA. President Chavez was on hand for the day's events, but in rare fashion, offered only brief comments at the military procession. Separately, Minister of Popular Power for Foreign Affairs Nicolas Maduro and Vice President Jorge Rodriguez strongly criticized Latin American leaders for their supposed verbal attacks against Venezuela. End Summary.

"Patriotism, Socialism, or Death!"

¶2. (SBU) The BRV marked the 196th anniversary of Venezuela's Independence on July 5 with a civil-military parade that included substantial participation by civilian groups loyal to President Chavez. Over 12,000 members of the Bolivarian Armed Forces and the Reservist Corps participated in the ceremony. In addition, more than 3,000 members of pro-government communal councils participated. Civilian defense units linked to Seniat, the tax collection agency, and petro-dependencies PDVSA and Pequiven also marched shouting "Long Live Venezuela! We are Socialists!" Nine Sukhoi aircraft were unable to perform previously scheduled acrobatic maneuvers due to poor weather conditions. To conclude the event, the parade's commander affirmed, "Patriotism, Socialism, or Death! We Will Overcome!"

¶3. (C) As was the case last year and has been normal practice for over a year for official military functions in Venezuela, the DefAtt was not invited to the civilian-military parade. The DefAtt attended the ceremony using the Ambassador's invitation, which was delivered on July 4. DefAtt noted that President Chavez appeared in good spirits and greeted the diplomatic corps before the parade commenced.

Chavez Leaves Speech to Others

¶4. (SBU) Following the military parade, Chavez attended a special session at the National Assembly (NA), but surprisingly did not give a speech. Instead, Janlisbert "Libertad" Velasco, a "Bolivarian" student leader from the Central University of Venezuela (UCV) addressed the NA. She is the first student to ever give the keynote address at the July 5 festivities. Velasco referred to Chavez as the "inspirational father" of the revolutionary youth and urged legislators and judges to move the "revolution" forward. Regarding the opposition, Velasco said that "reconciliation is not possible with the coupsters, capitalists, oppressors, and mafiosos." She also warned that the BRV is under constant threat by the USG. Velasco, a communications major, participated in the student debate hosted by the NA where pro-RCTV student leaders walked out. Velasco is from the impoverished and predominately pro-Chavez 23 de Enero neighborhood on the outskirts of Caracas. It is rumored that Velasco received training in Cuba.

BRV Officials on ALBA, Mercosur

¶5. (SBU) Separately, BRV officials strongly criticized Latin America leaders for their supposed verbal attacks against Venezuela. After attending a wreath laying ceremony at the National Mausoleum, Minister of Popular Power for Foreign Affairs Nicolas Maduro told the press that recent comments by Peru's Foreign Minister regarding Chavez' Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) could negatively affect their bilateral relationship. Both Vice President Jorge Rodriguez and Maduro blamed the "hysterical right-wing" factions of the Brazilian and Paraguayan parliaments for delaying Venezuela's inclusion into the South American common market, Mercosur. Asked about the Ambassador's departure

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from Post, Maduro classified the Chief of Mission's tenure in Venezuela as a "failure."

Comment

¶6. (C) Interestingly (and uncharacteristically), President Chavez kept a low-profile during the July 5 festivities and instead allowed others to express their revolutionary fervor. Noticeably absent from the commemorative session at the National Assembly were Cardinal Jorge Liberato Urosa Savino and Podemos party leaders Ismael Garcia and Ricardo Gutierrez.

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